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ABSTRACT

The identification of teachers' subjective reports of stressors was investigated. Stress was defined as the teacher's subjective reception of demands from the environment. Teachers (N=53) were asked to list sources of stress and to respond to a questionnaire assessing teacher attitudes on corporal punishment and the stressful nature of teaching. Findings revealed that the most frequent sources of stress for teacher practitioners were interactions with children, problems with time, interactions with the administration, interaction with parents and inadequate resources and materials, whereas sources of stress for student teachers were concerns over teaching competence and performance, and children's behavior and discipline. Responses to the questionnaire revealed a significant difference between practicing and student teachers about corporal punishment, with student teachers opposing it and practicing teachers favoring its use. Recommendations for reducing and/or dealing with stress were presented, with the suggestions stemming from a human services, psychological approach to elimination of corporal punishment in schools. (KA)

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TEACHER STRESS AND DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS: A PRELIMINARY REPORT

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A major premise of this paper is that the network of factors involved in attitudes and practices with regard to the use of corporal punishment in schools is complex and cannot be fully understood without considering the context in which teachers work. There is considerable research which indicates that teaching is a stressful occupation (National Education Association, 1967; Fuller, 1969; Moses and Delaney, 1970; Parsons and Fuller, 1972). Informal discussions with teachers and principals indicate that the educational environment is becoming even more stressful with one educator referring to this period as the "stressful seventies" (Hyman, 1978). One perspective on the use of corporal punishment may be its possible relationship with teacher stress.

Efforts to eliminate corporal punishment in the schools have met with only sporadic success. As of 1978 only four states, plus a small number of districts and local schools, had statutes or policies prohibiting the use of corporal punishment in schools (Hyman, 1978). Yet there seems to be little evidence that hitting or spanking children for school infractions is effective in eliminating the behaviors that are disruptive or unacceptable. In fact, previous research has indicated that the use of corporal punishment may be associated with negative consequences and may produce behaviors contrary to those desired by the teacher or an administrator (Bongiovanni, 1977; N. Feshbach and Hoffman, 1978). The adherence and continuation of a practice which does not appear to be functional suggests that the use of corporal punishment in the schools may be a reflection of teacher stress. One promising strategy to pursue in efforts to eliminate corporal punishment that might serve children and teachers is to pay attention to factors contributing to teacher stress, and its reduction.

Most of the studies pertinent to our topic fall into two general categories. The first is composed of those studies focusing on aspects of teacher stress, such as the incidence of reported stress and anxiety and the identification of stressors (Fuller, 1969; Olander and Farrell, 1970; Parsons and Fuller, 1972; Coates and Thoreson, 1976; Styles and Cavanaugh, 1977). The work of Fuller (1969) and Parsons and Fuller (1972) illustrates this approach. In both of these studies the reports of experienced teachers reflected great concern with regard to their role in the provision of effective instruction. In this vein, Olander and Farrell (1970) found that lack of time, meeting individual needs of children and lack of teaching aides were among the primary problems cited by teachers. Many of these previous studies do not appear to distinguish stress from related concepts such as anxiety, or from other terms such as problems or concerns. Also, summary statements integrating the various findings are difficult since different instruments and samples, as well as concepts, have been used.

The second category of studies in the area of teacher stress goes beyond the mere documentation of teacher stress or anxiety. In these latter studies there are attempts to link these problems to disciplinary attitudes and practices, an approach not unlike some parent-child interaction research (N. Feshbach, 1973) and some child abuse research (Parke and Collmer, 1975; Passman and Mulhern, 1977). One of the six conclusions emerging from the 1972 Task Force Report on Corporal Punishment of the National Education Association was that teachers, and other educators, use corporal punishment "...almost exclusively where conditions for dealing with disruptions are so poor that school staff has reached a point of total frustration" (page 3, 1972). It was concluded that even competent teachers, working in adverse

conditions may abandon all attempts to maintain discipline without striking children. Papanek (1971) looked at conflict situations between a kindergarten teacher and other school employees and found that the teacher expressed derogatory attitudes toward the children only on those days in which conflict occurred.

Historically, stress has been defined by different researchers as an inferred inner state or an observable response to a stimulus (Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend, 1974). From the many available definitions of stress we selected McGrath's 1970 sequence of events in stress research as the most compatible for our study. McGrath's four item sequence is initiated by what is termed an objective demand from the environment upon the individual. Second, there is the reception of the objective demand by the individual. Third, the focal organism responds to the information as received at either a physiological, psychological, behavioral or social-interactive level. And fourth, the individual experiences the consequence(s) of his or her response. In terms of McGrath's analysis two children may be arguing over a ball on the playground and approach the teacher to solve the problem (the demand). The teacher sees the two children and forms an opinion of what is occurring (the reception). The teacher may conclude that the argument has gone on long enough and removes the ball from both children (the response) and then the teacher is faced with the consequences of this response. McGrath suggests the term stress can be applied to any, or all, of the four steps in the sequence. For our purposes, we defined stress as approximating the first and second steps so that it is the teacher's subjective reception of demands from the environment rather than the response or consequences. It is the identification of the teachers' subjective reports of stressors that constitutes the subject of this investigation.

METHOD

Subjects

A total of fifty-three teachers participated in the study. Twenty-seven were practicing teachers and twenty-six were student teachers in the Teacher Education Laboratory at UCLA. Most of the practicing teachers work at a predominantly white, middle class elementary school in Southern California while the student teachers were assigned to schools ranging significantly in terms of the SES of students enrolled at the school. The majority of both practicing and student teachers are white, approximately three-fourths are female and the age range is from 23 to 55.

Procedure

A. Stress Measure. The procedure used to assess teachers' perceptions of stress is similar to the one used in a series of studies on maternal stress being carried in our laboratory at UCLA. The teachers are asked to list ten sources of stress they experience as classroom teachers and are then asked to rank the sources from the most stressful to the least by assigning a rank of one to the most stressful, two to the second most stressful and so on. Teachers were informed of the particular conceptualization of stress which had been adopted for this study to insure their understanding of the term.

B. Questionnaire. The teachers were also asked to respond to a short ten item questionnaire assessing teacher attitudes on corporal punishment and the stressful nature of teaching. In addition to these two items, the questionnaire also contained eight filler questions pertaining to year round schools, teacher associations and the evaluation of administrators. Respondents indicated agreement or disagreement with each of the ten items on a five point scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree."

Findings

A. Sources of stress. In order to analyze and evaluate the sources of stress the practicing and student teachers reported, we first categorized their responses and then organized the responses in terms of the rankings the teachers had assigned to the stressful items. In terms of the first set of data for the practicing teachers, eleven categories emerged from our analysis of the teacher responses. The categories, and specific items within each category, are presented in Table I. As can be seen from this data interactions with children are reported by practicing teachers as the most frequent source of stress, followed by problems with time, interactions with the administration, interactions with parents and inadequate resources and materials.

A comparison of the findings yielded by separately calculating the category frequencies and rankings for the practicing teachers discloses a high similarity between these two analyses, especially with regard to the stressful nature of interactions with children, problems with time and interactions with parents. The category "Interactions with children" was the most frequently listed and also the highest ranked source of stress. For practicing teachers "Problems with time" were the second most frequently mentioned as well as the second highest ranked. These appear to be both stressful for many of the teachers as well as more stressful than the other categories. However, there are three categories that changed significantly in terms of their placements in the frequency and ranking orders. "Meeting the individual needs of children and class size" was the eighth most frequently mentioned category but was the fourth highest ranked. Similarly, "Personal problems" was the tenth category as per frequency but was ranked sixth. These two categories appear

to be very stressful for those teachers who experience them, and yet they are not reported by a great number of them. On the other hand, "Inadequate resources and materials" was the fifth most frequently mentioned category but dropped significantly in the rank order. It appears that this category is a source of stress for many practicing teachers and yet the degree of stress is not as great as that for other stressors.

When we analyzed the data from the student teachers different categories and frequencies of stressors emerged. In Table II are listed the ten categories with their respective frequencies. An inspection of the table reflects that concerns over teaching competence and performance, and children's behavior and discipline are the two most frequently mentioned items. A comparison of category frequencies and rankings shows that the three categories which had received the highest frequencies also were the most highly ranked in terms of the number of first and second listings. "Children's behavior and discipline" was the highest ranked category followed by "Relations with the master teacher" and "Concerns over teaching competence and performance."

B. Responses to the questionnaire. Responses of the practicing and student teachers to the ten items on the questionnaire were analyzed in terms of significant differences to those questions relevant to the present study. The only significant difference which emerged was in regard to responses to Question C which asked the respondents to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the following question: "Teachers should have the right to use corporal punishment." Student teachers overwhelmingly expressed strong disagreement with the statement, whereas practicing teachers exhibited more dissimilarity of response. The difference between the responses of student and practicing teachers to Question C was significant at the .05 level for the chi square analysis.

Discussion

The results from our analysis of the teachers' responses are similar to those reported by other investigators, especially those of Fuller (1969 and 1972). Olander and Farrell (1970) found that teachers reported, among other things, lack of time to help children individually, lack of a daily preparation period and paper work as problems. These were also included in our teachers' reported sources of stress. Moses and Delaney (1970) conducted research which yielded 18 rotated factors. Several of our categories such as "Relationships with colleagues," "Other school duties," and "Relationships with the administration" overlap with these factors. It does appear from our findings, however, that the teachers in our study reported more stress deriving from student behavior and concerns over discipline.

Of particular interest is the difference between the responses of student and practicing teachers regarding the right of teachers to use corporal punishment. While there are, of course, many possible explanations for this difference, we believe that this finding lends support to our hypothesis of a link between chronic teacher stress and the use of corporal punishment. There is now the need for more direct observational studies of classrooms and teacher behavior in classrooms. As Coates and Thoreson (1976) have pointed out, it is impossible to draw firm and unambiguous conclusions about the causal relationship of stress or anxiety and teacher performance with information from pencil and paper, self report measures. Until such observational studies are completed the specific effects of stressors on teacher behavior are unknown. The data presented in this report represent but a step in investigating the relationship and indicate that teaching is perceived as a stressful occupation by those in the profession. Teachers are

capable of identifying specific stressors and demonstrate differences in regards to both the sources and intensities of stress.

Recommendations

We would like to suggest a number of possible recommendations that might reduce or help practicing teachers deal with stress in schools. Our data section suggests several areas: administrators could be more careful to not interrupt classes or make unnecessary schedule changes; teachers could be provided with more adequate materials, and be given support in terms of release time and in not performing so many other, non-teaching roles. There could also be help with staff relations and functioning as a team member.

Pre-service training is also a potentially valuable place to reduce stress. Hunter (1977) has indicated that the best preventive measure for stress is excellent pre-service training which is followed by in-service training designed to allow teachers to become increasingly effective in making on the spot decisions in classrooms. In this regard teachers could profit from training in the use of "distributively" based punishments which are restorative in nature and are intrinsically related to an infraction instead of "retributively" based punishments which are retaliatory and bear little relation to the infraction (Feshbach and Feshbach, 1973).

It is naive to expect that stress can be entirely eliminated or even reduced significantly in the near future. Seyle (1975) has suggested that stress is not something to be avoided and that the individual should aim to master and even to enjoy stress. In this context our discussion now shifts to procedures for coping with stress. Possibly, teachers could be helped to interpret stress as an inherent factor in teaching and not

necessarily a reflection on themselves. They should be helped to differentiate beneficial from harmful stress with the understanding that given the proper circumstances professional and personal growth may result from stress.

Second, in-service training needs to follow and expand upon pre-service training with the provision of on-site assistance. Papanek (1971) has suggested that when a classroom teacher receives inadequate assistance with classroom management problems he/she may engage in nonsanctioned behavior, such as being verbally or physically abusive to children. Papanek emphasizes the necessity of teaching alternative, sanctioned behaviors to practicing teachers. Similarly, the NEA Task Force on Corporal Punishment recommended that there be staff in-service programs in interpersonal relations, understanding emotions and on handling disruptive children. Also, in case studies reported by N.I.E. (1978) it was reported that the single most important difference between schools labelled "safe" and those labelled "violent" was a principal who served as a role model for students and staff alike and who instituted and maintained a system of firm and consistent discipline.

Third, Coates and Thoreson (1976) report that there is an emerging technology of stress and tension management which includes techniques such as systematic desensitization, relaxation training, participant modeling, and behavior management. Such techniques should be made available on a confidential basis to teachers without requiring the teacher to go through his or her principal. Hyman (1978) suggests that adequate support services should be negotiated by the teaching staff and made a part of the negotiated contract with the school board.

The final mechanism suggested as enabling teachers to deal with stress relates to the provision of a social support system for teachers. Cobb (1976) has indicated that the idea of the importance of supportive interaction among people is nothing new. However, what is new is the accumulation of evidence that adequate social support can help people in crisis situations. At the local school level the teachers need a support system of both peers and principal. As an example, teachers should be rewarded by administrators for good teaching, and not only for their appearance or for success at turning in reports. Administrators cannot interact with teachers solely in regards to nonteaching matters such as announcements, after-school activities, staff parties, etc. The point is that teachers need general support as people as well as support for their performance in the role of teacher and that such support should come from both administrators and other teachers.

Conclusion

The suggestions that have been made stem from a human services, psychological approach to the elimination of corporal punishment in the schools. We have focused on teacher stress as a variable possibly linked with the use of physical disciplinary practices. Other variables such as values and teacher socialization are also involved. Inherent in our perspective is the assumption that progress could be made by a careful consideration and improvement of the context in which teachers work. It is our hope that the provision of such a model or approach on behalf of teachers may be adopted by the teachers themselves in regard to their interactions with children and may consequently improve the educational context for the children as well as the teacher.

TABLE I

Sources of Stress as Reported by Practicing Teachers

Stressor		Frequency*
1. Interactions with children		39
	discipline/behavior	21
	difficulties with special children	14
	not specified, other	4
2. Problems with time		38
	not enough time	15
	interruptions and schedule changes	14
	rainy, windy days	5
	not specified, other	4
3. Interactions with administration		30
	local school administration	10
	district administration	7
	not specified, other	13
4. Interactions with parents		26
	pressure/criticism	13
	not specified, other	13
5. Inadequate resources and materials		21
	inadequate materials	12
	lack of aides	3
	poor working conditions	3
	noise	3
6. Other responsibilities		20
	too many roles and tasks	15
	not specified, other	5
7. Staff relations		17
	relations with other teachers	8
	team teaching	7
	not specified, other	2
8. Meeting the individual needs of children and class size		15
	meeting indv. needs of children	8
	class size	7
9. Paper work		15
10. Personal problems		15
	self doubts, criticism	9
	isolation from other adults	3
	not specified, other	3
11. Other, misc.		9

*Some teachers did not list ten items so that the total frequency is less than the expected 270.

TABLE II

Sources of Stress as Reported by Student Teachers

Stressor		Frequency*
1. Concerns over teaching competence and performance		51
effectiveness	25	
planning, preparation	11	
misc.	15	
2. Children's behavior and discipline		44
children's misbehavior	36	
responsibility for discipline	8	
3. Relations with master teacher		36
4. Time and scheduling		26
lack of enough time	12	
interruptions	7	
rainy days	7	
5. Relations with local school		25
disagreement with policies/programs	14	
principal/other administrators	6	
other teachers	5	
6. Personal		17
7. Relations with the university		14
university coordinator	7	
taking classes	7	
8. Parents		10
9. Inadequate supplies and materials		9
10. Misc. (paper work, etc.)		7

*Each student teacher did not list ten sources of stress so the total is less than the expected 260.

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